

NEWS

Yankees honor disabled vets, thank Marines for sacrifice

STORY BY GUNNERY
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NEW YORK — Honor, Courage and Commitment are one of the many mottos of the Marine Corps. For Cpl. Hector Delgado and Lance Cpl. Ian Lennon, those words have a very special meaning. Both were severely injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Although both Marines were still recovering, they got up out of their hospital beds for a night with the 26-time World Champions -- the New York Yankees.

The Yankees and the Disabled American Veterans Association hosted disabled veterans from World War II, Vietnam, and Desert Storm along with Delgado and Lennon to a night of the American pastime.

Both OIF veterans have come a long way for the baseball game.

Delgado, a native of Selden, N.Y., was coming off a convoy outside An-Nasiriyah, Iraq on April 14, when he was injured at Camp Viper. He and his buddies were getting out of the sun under a tractor-trailer when the legs gave way and the trailer landed on top of Delgado, crushing his pelvis.

The accident may have crushed his pelvis, but it didn't crush his spirit.

"I thought I was going to die at first," said Delgado. "But I

was determined to stay alive. My mother taught me about determination."

After spending 25-minutes under the massive weight of the trailer, Delgado was medevacked to the hospital ship USNS Comfort. He then began what would be a long and painful trek back to the States.

I went from the ship to Kuwait and then to Germany. After that, I headed back to the states and finally got to St. Charles Hospital in Long Island, he said.

It might have been a long road home, but the journey to rehabilitation is far from over.

"The docs say I have to go through about a year's worth of rehab," said Delgado. "The only plans I have right now are to get well again."

On this long journey to recovery Delgado won't travel alone. "I have such great support from my family and especially my girlfriend Andrea," he said.

Andrea Davanzo has been seeing Delgado for a year and is impressed with progress since he returned from overseas.

"It's unbelievable how much he's accomplished in the past few months," said Davanzo. "There's no doubt in my mind that he will walk again."

Although Delgado is in a wheel chair right now, he left the

hospital for home after the game. The corporal isn't the only one with a big support group. Lance Cpl. Ian Lennon, who joined the Corps on Nov. 4, 2000, has all his family, friends and the Disabled American Veterans Association in his corner as well.

Lennon, who served as a Motor Transportation Marine with the 5th Marine Regiment in Kuwait sustained massive burns to his body and face on March 6.

According to his mother Debbie Lennon, she is very pleased with his service to the Marine Corps and country.

"It was his decision to join the Marines," she said. "At first I wasn't too happy about it, but I don't push my kids. They are adults and have to make decisions on their own. I am so proud of him and what he did for our country and I am happy that he made it home."

Lennon a native of Lindenhurst, N.Y., is a quiet kid with a talent for fixing things.

"He was always working on things," said his mother. "He'd come home with dirty hands from fixing cars. That's Ian."

Although Lennon's mother is happy her son is home, she is realistic about his injuries. "I know it is going to be a long haul for Ian," she said. "He is coming home, but has to go to Texas for more surgery, and I am glad that he now

has an extended family with Al Giordano and the Disabled American Veterans Association."

"The DAV is more than happy to help," said Al Giordano, membership chairman for the DAV. "As we Marines say, we take care of our own." Giordano, who served in the Corps from '82-'85, says that vets like Delgado and Lennon will always have a support network to help them.

"God forbid if someone isn't there for my children when they need it," he said. "Or me for that matter. That is why we are here for them and all disabled veterans, whether their injuries are sustained in combat or accidental."

Giordano started organizing DAV nights with the Yankees last year and was very impressed with the team's support.

"The Yankees are a class organization," said Giordano. "They showed true professionalism and compassion for the disabled vets. It was first class all the way."

Before the game started, nine disabled veterans marched to center field just above second base at Yankee Stadium. They received a standing ovation for their honor, courage, and commitment to their service, families and country.

Those three words, honor, courage and commitment, may be one of the many mottos of the Marines, but it would take many more words to summarize what disabled veterans and all veterans have done and do for America.



Gunnery Sgt. Tim McGough
Corporal Hector Delgado, waves to the fans at Yankee Stadium. Delgado joined his fellow disabled military veterans as they were honored for their sacrifice and service.



Cpl. Thomas Perry
Sergeant William McQuarters, a supply clerk for the Depot's Property Control Office, fixes the net prior to the start of the H&SBn. NCO challenge Aug. 27. Service Co. defeated Headquarters Co. 15-12 in the second game of a best-of-three series to earn the H&SBn. trophy.

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the game to earn the Battalion Trophy.

Colonel George S. Amland, H&SBn. commanding officer, was on hand to award a trophy to the winning team. He also thanked all of the Marines for showing up.

"Because our battalion is spread throughout such a wide area, we don't get a chance to get to know each other as well as we should," said Amland, whose comments were slightly overshadowed by the hurried construction of a 12-foot tall clown-faced dunk tank. "This is a great opportunity for us."

After the niceties of the day were through, it was time for many of the officers and staff NCOs to climb the metallic stairs onto the dunk tank platform.

For just one dollar, a Marine received three throws with a softball. If one of those throws struck the clown's nose, splash!

Yet once the balls began to fly, it was obvious that a slow, steady squeeze and controlled breathing were not going to help the Marines hit their target. Based on the accuracy of the Marines' throws, the American

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- Col. Gary S. Amland, H&SBn. commanding officer

people should be very glad that their "911 Force" doesn't have to throw bullets at the enemy.

Eventually, the Marines found their targets, and the officers and staff NCOs of H&SBn. began to drop into the cool waters of the dunk tank.

Around 3 p.m., the crowd began to thin out as the excitement of the dunk tank began to fade. Service Co. left the court the champion, but because of the camaraderie that was built and the friendships that were forged among the Marines of both companies, the battalion was the real winner.

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great for doing that."

Aside from being educational the cookout also provided the children an opportunity to share some time with their parents, who might not normally have the time during the day due to a hectic work schedule.

"I came to this because my daughter was involved, and I didn't want her to be out here alone saying, 'Where's my momma?'" said Sgt. Nicole Norman, drill instructor at Support Bn., who said that she was thankful that she had the opportunity to attend the event. "I have to do what I have to do to be there for my

daughter when I can."

After all the children got their faces painted and had their fill of a variety of cultural delectables, they each took a swing at the piñata in an effort to reach the hidden treasures inside.

After it was all said and done, the children left the cookout with bags full of candy and smiles on their faces.

"[International Week] went great," said Ghionis. "The children really enjoyed having the cookout and having their parents involved as well. It was a lot of work that the parents and the teachers did, but the children enjoyed it so that's what's important."



Lance Cpl. Jennifer Brofer
Monique Bertrand, 3, daughter of Sgt. Nicole Norman, drill instructor for Support Bn., gets her face painted with flowers during the cookout.

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